

NEWS RELEASE

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Public, private match funds for study of Blanchard Mountain

Study to define economic, social, ecological values

OLYMPIA – The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in partnership with Northwest Ecosystem Alliance (NWEA), is hiring an outside consultant to complete a study of the benefits of the 4,827-acre Blanchard Mountain forestland, announced Commissioner of Public Lands Doug Sutherland today. Blanchard Mountain is state trust land managed by DNR to help fund Skagit County roads and local services such as school bonds, school operations, hospital and port.

The 2001 Legislature appropriated \$25,000 to be matched by non-state funds of \$25,000 to finance the independent study. The legislative direction defined the study as an “evaluation of the social, ecological, and financial value” of Blanchard Mountain lands.

“I want to thank Northwest Ecosystem Alliance for offering the matching funds,” said Sutherland. “I expect that the study will offer important information to DNR as trust land steward. Additionally, this public and private partnership offers us opportunities to share knowledge about these lands that we all care about very much.”

State Senator Harriet Spanel said: “I’m glad to see this progressing. The idea to protect the multi-use benefits of Blanchard was brought to me several years ago by the Sierra Club’s Mt. Baker group. Some hard work and cooperation between all parties have brought it closer to reality.”

A request for proposals will be offered in the coming weeks to find the best firm to carry out the study. Upon its completion in June 2002, a report will be provided to the Legislature, and DNR and NWEA will present the findings to the public.

“Blanchard Mountain is one of the premier recreational areas for Skagit and Whatcom counties. People come from all over to hike and bike here because it’s beautiful and it’s snow-free most of the year. We’re interested in seeing what benefits recreational use has for the surrounding area,” said Lisa McShane, Director of Northwest Ecosystem Alliance Community Outreach Program. “We’re pleased to work with the DNR on this study. As you can imagine, \$25,000 is a lot of money for us to raise, but we believe it’s important to understand all the benefits of these lands when decisions are made regarding their use.”

Timber harvest on Blanchard limited during study

DNR will continue forest management activities and timber harvesting during the study, but as stipulated by the Legislature, timber harvesting on Blanchard will be limited to sales that would not include conifer clear-cuts.

An upcoming proposed sale, called the “Pecan Timber Sale,” is being designed to generate funds and create better wildlife habitat by selectively cutting and thinning marketable trees. This gives the remaining trees the opportunity to grow larger and provide long-term habitat for wildlife. DNR will hold a community meeting about the Pecan sale at 7:00 p.m., Nov. 14, at the Alger

Community Hall. Neighbors can see what is planned and offer ideas about the proposed timber sale, which is tentatively scheduled for auction in 2002.

Blanchard Mountain background

Blanchard Mountain is part of a forested coastal mountain range with 50- to 70-year-old trees, and diverse fish and wildlife habitat. In addition to revenue production and habitat protection, DNR manages the mountain to provide opportunities as a recreation destination for enthusiasts to enjoy hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking, hang-gliding, observing wildlife and panoramic views of the surrounding Puget Sound, San Juan Islands and lower Skagit Valley.

DNR as steward and trust land manager

DNR manages more than 3 million acres of state-owned trust land forest, agricultural, range, and commercial lands to help fund the building of public schools, universities and other state institutions, and help fund local services in many counties, including Skagit County.

In addition, DNR is steward of about 125,000 combined acres of Natural Resources Conservation Areas and Natural Area Preserves statewide, and of more than 2.6 million acres of aquatic lands – lands and beaches of Puget Sound and the coast, navigable lakes and rivers – for all the people of the state.

Northwest Ecosystem Alliance

Bellingham-based Northwest Ecosystem Alliance is a non-profit organization that works to protect and restore wildlands in the Pacific Northwest. They are best known for their successful campaign to fund the transfer of 25,000 acres of state trust lands in the Loomis State Forest into conservation status. Northwest Ecosystem Alliance works to focus attention on the public values of clean water, quality recreation and wildlife habitat, along with revenue production, in the management of our state forestlands.

Additionally, the Alliance is working on timber trade issues in Canada, safeguarding the rules on national forests throughout Washington State, and spearheading the Cascades Conservation Partnership campaign to connect critical wildlife habitat between the north Cascade and south Cascade Mountains.

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